

Training – Stick Schtick

One of the most basic functions we do in RC flying is to move the “sticks” of the transmitter. In training with the instructors, we learn which stick does what, and as we start to fly, we begin to get a feel for how much to move the sticks and when to move them in order to accomplish a particular in-flight maneuver. In time, each of these commands becomes automatic and you will not even think about them. But, then there is the question of HOW do you move the sticks? Some pilots just put their thumbs on the top (or end) of the sticks and control all movements with just their thumbs (the sticks of most transmitters are made with knurled ends). Others pinch the sticks rather lightly between the thumb and index finger. There can obviously be other variations. **Let me state right here, that the official recommendation of the training staff at CVA is to use your thumb and index finger.** Your instructor will suggest that you start your student flying that way. I know that when I first started I was certain that I wanted to “thumb it”. But after trying it for a short while and at the suggestion of my instructor, I switched over to thumb and finger and felt more comfortable and confident. I have stayed with that method.

That said however, we probably all vary our technique a little at various times without ever knowing what we do. I recently asked three of our instructors to give me their comments on this subject with the thought that I would summarize the essence of what they all said in this column. Their responses were so informative however, that I have decided to let you read most of what they had to say without much edit. We will not divulge which instructor had which comments, though.

One instructor had this to say....”When I started I was a thumb'r and...(his two instructors)... encouraged me to use two fingers. I find I have much more control especially using a tray. I can keep light pressure on the sticks and have better control especially when things get a little exciting. I think that under stress situations your hands tighten up and you could easily allow a thumb to slip off of the stick”.

The second instructor responded this way....”I've always felt that thumb/index finger gives more positive control than thumbs only, since you get a better X--Y directional feel. That said, I've seen some really good pilots using thumbs only, so I am not all that sure”.

I believe that for a brand new student that doesn't have any experience, teaching thumb/index finger is the better option. I have read various pros and cons, and am not sure that one is significantly better than the other in the long haul, although I have noticed that thumbs only pilots tend to release the sticks (with the attending "pop") more than thumb/index finger pilots. When the stick is released, it is obvious that control is lost for a short time until the fingers can get back to the stick.”

And from the third instructor we got this insight....”When I started back into the hobby, I was using my thumbs. I think that was a carry-over from the days of the old thick, bulky transmitters with no neck strap provisions of the 60-70's where you needed four fingers under the box to hold it in place. (Another instructor) pointed me to use two fingers, which I do now, or at least think I do most of the time.

I say that because, a couple weeks back or so, I was flying and a couple of my recent students were out at the pilot's box, chatting as I was flying, and one of them remarked, 'Hey, you're using your thumbs!'. When I thought about it, I sort of was. Now that I'm aware of it, I realize I mainly hold a thumb on the top back edge of the stick but at the closest edge to me, and the index finger alongside the front-upper side of the stick, pinching it. It is guided by two fingers, but if I lift my thumb, it will spring back to center.

I guess I do that as I often allow the stick to spring back to center and then re-grasp it when I want to return to a neutral attitude after a fast maneuver, such as a high speed roll. The stick centers itself faster than I can move my hands and it can sometimes be hard to feel the exact neutral position on the stick yourself, so the springs do the work for the split second it takes for them to re-center the stick before I put my thumb and index finger back on it."

So, there you have many years of combined wisdom and experience in one page of print. As I said at the beginning, the official recommendation of the club training staff is to **start using your thumb and index finger**. It may be that as your flying progresses you will adjust your technique, but I think you will be glad you started this way.

Until next time.....remember to try something new each time you fly.

Steve Klute
Training Coordinator